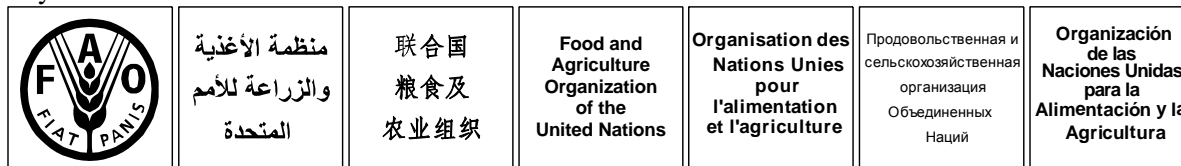


July 2012



COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

TWENTY-FIRST SESSION

Rome, Italy, 24-28 September 2012

STRENGTHENING FORESTRY'S CROSS-SECTORAL LINKAGES

Sound information and knowledge base for better policies and good governance

I. BACKGROUND

1. Forest information requirements of policy makers have grown considerably. They evolved from forest area and growing stock information to cover more key aspects of sustainable forest management such as biodiversity or ecosystem services. Over the last decade, information on socio-economic issues, including contribution of forests to livelihoods and poverty reduction have become more important. More recently, information on governance and broader land use issues have gained in prominence, along with a focus on carbon. The past decade has also witnessed an increased policy focus on land use and tenure issues.

2. Policy makers require more and better information to effectively enhance the role of forests in reducing the impact of climate change and in providing other key ecosystem services. As countries strive towards more sustainable, greener economies and towards enhancing the contribution of forests to sustainable energy and food security, policy makers require trend and outlook information on the wider context, including demand for food, energy and wood fiber, or on employment and rural development issues. They are also increasingly challenged to provide evidence of forest management outcomes and good governance of forests. All of these require a sound information and knowledge base for policy decision making at different levels.

3. Existing information and knowledge on forest resources and their benefits is inadequate. In 2010, only around 45 countries world wide were able to assess forest area through national forest inventories, while 84 countries did so through remote sensing, albeit with highly varied quality and age of images. Only 22 countries' estimated forest area change through repeated systematic inventories of forest land. In many developing countries, there is an on-going debate on the scale and rate of deforestation, as well as a need to strengthen the information and knowledge base on a range of fundamental aspects of sustainable forest management (SFM).

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II. MAIN CHALLENGES

4. While the forest sector faces an increasingly large diversity of data needs on forest and land use, the capacities to collect, compile and analyse data and related forest resources information systems are often inadequate. Data collection, storage and analysis come at a considerable cost and often exceed the technical and analytical capacities of forestry organizations dealing with information and knowledge. Another important aspect is the financial and technical sustainability of national forest monitoring systems. National institutions often face considerable challenges collecting and maintaining data, conducting data analysis and undertaking subsequent inventories or assessments. Repeated measurements are needed to assess changes and impacts of policies, including on reliable estimates of land cover change. One challenge for policy makers is to diagnose, assess and monitor how well they govern forests, i.e. how well they undertake policy and planning, implementation, monitoring and improvement and to show results on progress towards sustainable forest management. In many countries the forest sector suffers from lack of adequate information and means to address illegal operations and non-compliance with the law, which often have detrimental impacts on the environment, on forest revenue and forest dependent communities.

5. Existing forest resources information is often not made available and is hence not widely known or not sufficiently used for policy decisions. Quite frequently, access to data is limited to one or few individuals in the forest administration. This may be due to the reluctance of national forest administrations to share data with other institutions and users, issues of ownership rights, data integrity or lack of full institutional acceptance of the data. A frequent issue is the lack of forest information systems that allow easy access to data in an easily understandable format, addressing stakeholders' diverse interests and information needs.

6. Apart from bio-physical forest data, most policy decisions also require socio-economic, governance and general land use related information. For instance, maintenance of forest cover and quality of forests is closely related to agricultural land use issues, rural development questions including on poverty alleviation and gender issues, subsistence needs of local communities, employment trends, land tenure conditions, or conflicts over management responsibilities. National statistical offices, environmental agencies as well as territorial planning and agricultural services, universities and other bodies usually have their own systems of related land use information with varying reference to forest related information. Many of these data are relevant to understand the context and trends which affect forest management and use, and are needed for sound policy decisions.

III. THE WAY FORWARD

7. A sound information and knowledge base for better policies and good governance needs to be strongly aligned with strategic policy goals, equally addressing forest sector policies, including the national forest programme (NFP), and wider developmental policies of the countries (national development goals, economic development strategies, poverty reduction strategies), and be able to fulfill international reporting commitments. In order to be broadly accepted and used, all key stakeholders need to be involved in the process of identifying information needs and building systems to provide information.

8. FAO has worked with over 50 countries in all regions of the world to support the development of national forest information systems and to build related capacities. Direct support to National Forest Monitoring and Assessments has been provided to over 20 countries and a range of countries have been supported in strengthening their information systems on forest fires, pests and diseases. FAO also organizes national and regional workshops for dialogue on improving national assessment and monitoring of natural resources, involving more than 30 countries to date. The UN-REDD Programme is supporting countries to develop cost-effective, robust and compatible national monitoring,

verification and reporting systems, providing tools, methodologies, training and knowledge sharing that help countries to strengthen their technical and institutional capacity for effective Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV). FAO supports national forest programmes of member countries as platforms for dialogue, which can be used for facilitating the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in identifying information needs, and for the use of data in evidence-based development and evaluation of forest policies, strategies and programmes.

9. More guidance is becoming available on measuring socio-economic aspects of forestry including on livelihoods, rural development, employment and gender issues. There is a need for better coordination and strengthened collaboration with other bodies collecting such data. For example, a range of forest-related socio-economic variables can potentially be incorporated in periodic household surveys of national statistical offices or agricultural censuses. This will contribute to strengthening the legitimacy of and access to the data as well as sustainability of data collection and information systems. Substantial work is also being undertaken to further develop methodologies to assess the contribution of the various forests ecosystem services, livelihoods and development with a view to facilitate awareness-raising on the multiple benefits of forests to societies and informed decision making.

10. Generating information on the quality of forest governance is becoming increasingly important, especially in the context of forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) and programmes to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). FAO supports member countries in addressing (FLEGT) issues through a dedicated programme supported by the European Union which includes providing a sound information and knowledge base and improving forest governance.

11. Based on a request by COFO in 2010, FAO and PROFOR/World Bank have jointly developed the Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance¹, which is based on existing Criteria and Indicator processes, FRA indicators and initiatives to develop indicators for good forest governance. The Framework facilitates description, diagnosis, monitoring, assessment and reporting on the state of governance in a country's forest sector. It features a globally relevant and comprehensive list of the major elements that describe forest governance. It also provides a frame of reference for organizing governance-relevant information that can be used within and across countries to assess and monitor the governance of forests and forest resources. It can assist countries in reflecting on and responding to critical issues in forest governance in ways that can be measured, tracked and improved over time. FAO is supporting a range of countries in strengthening their related information systems, based on the broad awareness that good governance is essential for progress towards sustainable forest management, and that more information on governance aspects is needed. The extent and quality of information on the quality of governance often allows to better determine whether forest resources are used efficiently, sustainably and equitably, and whether countries are achieving forest-related development goals.

12. There is an urgent need for high-level political commitment to conduct periodic monitoring and to develop information systems that provide wide and free access to data collected, and for more pro-active dissemination and promotion of the use of datasets collected by various stakeholders. Effective support to policy review and development requires inter-organization collaboration in data storage, analysis, and provision of answers to pertinent questions in on-going deliberations. For example, a range of forest-related socio-economic variables can potentially be incorporated in periodic household surveys of national statistics offices or agricultural censuses. This could strengthen legitimacy of the data, collaboration and coordination between forest sector institutions and national statistic offices, and long-term sustainability. Capacity building at the country level needs to include a range of different organizations, with particular attention to strengthening national capacity to undertake analysis of data and presentation of the results in user-friendly formats. For instance, using

¹ FAO/World Bank, 2011: Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance, Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome.

geographical information systems (GIS) and remote sensing can greatly assist in visualising linkages between biophysical and socio-economic or governance aspects and in scenario analysis.

13. Collaboration across different national agencies and bodies also enhances the ability to fulfill international reporting requirements. Moreover, promoting collaboration, data and knowledge exchange at regional levels can greatly improve the quality of forest information systems and their usefulness for policy making. After all, many of the trends that affect sustainable forest management are regional or even global in nature.

IV. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- The Committee may wish to invite countries to strengthen their forest and natural resources information systems to better support evidence-based and future-oriented policy making and to make measurable progress towards SFM.
- The Committee may wish to invite member countries to strengthen their information and knowledge base on forest governance, using the FAO/World Bank Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance.
- The Committee may wish to recommend FAO to support countries in particular through:
 - guidance, capacity building and tools to develop comprehensive national forest information systems that are aligned with policy priorities and allow to assess and monitor the biophysical, socio-economic and governance dimensions of SFM;
 - guidance and tools to strengthen the knowledge base on socio-economic and broader land use aspects of forestry, including on livelihoods, rural development, poverty alleviation, gender and ecosystem services;
 - capacity building for the application of the Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance including on data collection;
 - promoting inter-organizational collaboration at national and regional levels to strengthen the information and knowledge base on forests and their use.